

"If you don't want it printed, don't let it happen."

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In debut, Spanish theater speaks language of dance

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By Megan Tackett, Aspen Daily News

Editor

Tonight's "Nuestras Voces — Teatro en Español" at The Arts Campus at Willits, or TACAW, is simultaneously a premier performance and a long time coming.

For TACAW Executive Director Ryan Honey, when the organization opened The Contemporary last month, it was obvious to him that a performance brought by VOICES — the Carbondale-based nonprofit dedicated to amplifying the stories of local Latino, women and youth community members — should be early and high on the programming priority list.

"As we were getting ready to open [The Contemporary], we have a strong commitment to make sure TACAW is a creative home for everyone that lives in the Valley, and we have large Spanish-speaking population here," Honey said, noting that TACAW had previously partnered with VOICES to bring programming to the Willits Wednesday Night Live outdoor series during the days of pandemic-caused public health restrictions.

"It was certainly obvious to



Director and performer Gabriela Alvarez Espinoza stands at a painter's easel while Sandra Prado poses downstage during a rehearsal at The Contemporary for "Lista para Bailar," or "Ready to Dance," a segment of a free performance tonight at 7:30 p.m. that represents a collaboration between nonprofit entities VOICES and The Arts Campus at Willits. Courtesy of Cassidy Willey

us that we were going to have a devised program in Spanish, the only one to work with, in our minds, was VOICES because they do it so well," he continued. "It's very intentional that this is our first theater piece on our stage and it's a devised piece of theater in Spanish, because we want to make a statement to that community that this is their home."

Under the direction of VOICES Program Developer Gabriela Alvarez Espinoza, the ensemble has been rehearsing throughout September on an original show of their creation titled "Así Bailamos," or "This Is How We Dance."

The show is a celebration of

how dance and movement are vital expressions to the human experience and features Alvarez Espinoza, Angélica Breña, Estela L. García, Marlin González, Carlos Herrera, Claudia Pawl, Flor M. Paz Pastrano and Sandra Prado.

"'Así Bailamos' is about what makes us identify as a Latin community; the warmth, the party, the Spanish, and the experiences we live throughout our lives as migrants, dreamers and workers," Alvarez Espinoza said in a statement. "The love for art and for our people and the desire to raise our voices to leave a message in the community and shout, 'This is

how we dance! This is how we move with life!' has brought us together to create this piece. A piece full of stories so different and so similar at the same time. I'm sure everyone will come out wanting to scream, hug and enjoy life — our life."

VOICES Executive Artistic Director Renee Prince said that in myriad ways, "Nuestra Voces" is the culmination of several factors coming together.

"We've been doing these types of projects ... where we bring a group of people into a room and start with nothing but our ideas and hopes and dreams and talents, and then we create a show," she said with a laugh. "'Nuestras Voces' is something we've been wanting to do for a long time. With Gabriella Espinoza returning to the valley, she's been an extraordinary director for the project. And TACAW's beautiful space opening up and their shared mission of being an artistic calm for the Latin community, there was some beautiful synchronistic magic that allowed this to happen."

In the spirit of true inclusivity and shared experiences, tonight's performance, at The Contemporary, 400 Robinson St., at 7:30 p.m. is free, thanks to underwriting by the Good Works Foundation. There is also a Sunday afternoon show, at 2 p.m. Additionally, live English interpretation will be available to audience members not fluent

in Spanish.

"We have an interpreter coming who's bringing 100 headsets. You get a headset if you're an English speaker, so you put it in one ear, and he sits on the side and live translates," Prince said. "So you in your own private moment hear what's going on in English."

She said that regardless of one's spoken language, the show will speak to everyone.

"There's dance, there's lots of story sharing," Prince continued of the 60-minute show. "It has really funny moments, there are really touching, poignant moments. Beautiful, vibrant music. It really is a ride for the audience. We work really hard to think about the audience experience as we're creating the show. It was really important to the cast that the audience leaves uplifted and feeling buoyed and inspired."

It's a sentiment echoed by ensemble member Sandra Prado.

"'Así Bailamos' is a set of stories about all of us, which are very different but have a common theme: dance, not only with our feet, but also with our lives," she said. "We created this work by opening our hearts in order to make the audience vibrate."